DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 184 514 IR 008 154

AUTHOR Schneider, Frederick C.
TITLE Public Television in Virginia. Telecommunications Study Commission, Working Paper No. 7.
INSTITUTION Virginia State Telecommunications Study Commission, Richmond.
PUB DATE 23 Aug 79
NOTE 18p.: For related documents, see IR 008 153 and IR 008 159

EDRS PRICE MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS Agency Role: Educational Television: Financial Support: *Government Role: *Public Television: *State Aid: State Programs
IDENTIFIERS *Virginia

ABSTRACT

This report examines the involvement of the Commonwealth of Virginia in both the support and governing of public television stations. There are seven such stations in the state, operated by four educational television entities; each of these corporations is controlled by a board of directors made up of citizens from the particular area served by the stations. Service levels described include broadcast coverage, programming, and national/state/local goals. Discussions of financial support and management provide an overview of the state's role in these areas. Conclusions reached indicate that the state needs to be more involved in the support and promotion of public television. Two references are cited. (RAO)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

ED184514

Working Paper # 7

TELECOMMUNICATIONS STUDY COMMISSION

"PUBLIC TELEVISION IN VIRGINIA"

AUGUST 23, 1979

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE ONLY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Gilbert W. Fairholm

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

A Staff Report by: FREDERICK C. SCHNEIDER

Gilbert W. Fairholm
Executive Director

Lawrence Douglas Wilder
Chairman
Thomas C. Boushall
Vice-Chairman
Patsy D. Carpenter
Dudley J. Emick, Jr.
Calvin W. Fowler
Nathan H. Miller
Thomas W. Moss, Jr.
Bonnie L. Paul
S. Wallace Stieffen
William T. Wilson
William L. Zimmer, III

IR008154

INTRODUCTION

Public television stations are non-commercial, non-profit stations which are publicly owned and operated. Within Virginia, there are seven such stations operated by four educational television entities. The particular stations and the controlling corporations are:

Operator	Station
Blue Ridge ETV Association, Inc.	WBRA-15 WSVN-47
Hampton Roads ETV Association, Inc.	WHRO-51
Shenandoah Valley ETV Corporation	WVPT-51
Central Virginia ETV Corporation	WCVE-23 WNVT-53 WCVW-57

The corporations are controlled by a Board of Directors made up of citizens from the particular area served by the stations. They are all classified as community licensees by the FCC. The involvement of the Commonwealth in both the support and governing of PTV stations is examined in this paper.

SERVICE LEVELS

Coverage

Public television programming is available to most of the citizens of Virginia. It has been estimated that better than 80% of the population of the State resides in areas that do have a Virginia PTV signal. That percentage will increase with the anticipated installation of a new transmitter (station) in the Marion area.

The PTV signal may reach a particular area in one or more ways. The primary method is broadcast from the main station antenna The areas of the State served by that method are shown on the map on page 2. In the case of WSVN in Norton, the signal reaches the transmitting tower after completing a microwave link from the main studios of the Blue Ridge Educational Television Association in Roanoke.

The mountains of Virginia and great distances between stations have necessitated a second method of signal distribution. This is the use of translators. Translators "rebroadcast" the original station signal. The translators (stations may have more than one) receive the original broadcast signal, change the frequency and rebroadcast the signal on a different channel. This use of translators serves to extend the range of the stations and "fills in gaps" caused by geographical features.

A third method of distribution is via cable systems. A commercial cable system picks up a station's original broadcast signal, puts it on the cable over some unused channel and sends

it out to subscribers. The cable system has the effect of extending the range of a station and often provides a better signal in the regular broadcast area.

Programming

The stations broadcast programming to meet the needs and interests of the population served. Cultural, educational, informational and instructional programming makes up the majority of the offering.

During the academic year, the hours from 9-3:30 are devoted almost exclusively to instructional programming selected for the school divisions of the State by Regional Schools Contract Planning Committees. Generally, this instructional programming is not offered during summer periods.

Additional programming is selected by the station for broadcast before and after the ITV period. Some locally originated programs are offered. These tend to center on regional interest topics and may be regularly scheduled series or one-of-a-kind presentations. Programming is available from other stations and various commercial services. At times, PTV stations broadcast programs originally planned for distribution nationwide via commercial stations. WCVE broadcast National Hockey League Stanley Cup competition in a recent year when no local commercial station was interested in doing so.

The Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) is the "fourth network" that provides much of the prime time programming offered over PTV stations. Many of the well-known series/programs such as Masterpiece Theater, Live from Lincoln Center and the McNeil/

Lehrer Report are available to the stations via satellite.

National/State/Local Goals

The PTV stations were originally organized as educational television (ETV) stations. A major service provided in earlier years was instructional television programming distribution. Today, the term public television (PTV) is more widely used and accepted. It is also consistent with the purpose of the stations.

The stations exist to serve the public. The term "public television was introduced to dramatize the emphasis on programming for general enrichment and information as well as for classroom instruction." (McGill, 1979)

> "To the extent that public television (on a national level) has a central philosophy it is represented by the term 'alternative service.' This undefined concept means different things to different licensees. To some, it implies a need to provide news and commentary that give an alternative to network newscasts; to some it implies a mandate to educate via programs specifically designed to instruct; to some it implies the need to provide material of high 'cultural' value - plays, operas, ballets; to some it implies coverage of otherwise obscure events such as minor sports; to some it implies becoming a medium of record--a recorder of events for posterity; to some it implies acting as an agent of change in the community; to some it implies providing programs that interest a limited but unserved audience. Actually, most public broadcasters seem to see alternative service as some combination of many of these factors, which are then given varying relative importance." (Katzman, 1976, pp. 32-33)

The PTV stations of Virginia attempt to provide the alternative service. The success experienced by any station is a result of the meshing of a number of factors. A station manager must have funds sufficient to buy or produce any programming. The station manager (who makes most programming decisions--often in conjunction with a program manager) must "read" the community

and recognize the needs and desires of the viewers.

The availability of appropriate equipment affects the offerings of a station. For example, a station with a "remote" unit may be able to broadcast a major civic event taking place at City Hall. The expertise and interests of the station personnel, including the station manager, influence a station's ability to provide alternative service. The relative poverty level of stations (for the nation in general) has prompted many engineers and producers to gain experience in PTV and then move on to more lucrative positions elsewhere.

The stations exist to serve the public. That is not inconsistent with the purpose of the State government.

FINANCIAL SUPPORT

Since some of the educational television corporations in Virginia operate more than one station, it is difficult to discuss finances specific to individual stations. The reporting is generally done by the corporation without differentiating between stations. An exception to that for reports provided to the Study Commission was WNVT and WCVE/WCVW operated by the Central Virginia Educational Television Corporation. WNVT income was reported separately.

The corporations/stations obtain money from a variety of sources. Three general income sources are State funds, local funds and federal funds. The local funds include, in part, municipal grants, membership contributions and auctions and other fund-raising activity. Federal funds are for the most part

grants from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting although there are other federal sources. The largest single source of income for stations in Virginia is the State government.

Each station is receiving (beginning in FY 1979) a $50,000 community service grant from the State.

The percentage of annual income attributable to each of the three major sources is shown below. The values were determined using information from only four stations that had responded to the request for such information. The fifth station was not included because it is on a fiscal year schedule not compatible with the other stations. The inclusion of the fifth station is likely to increase the percentage attributable to the State and decrease the percentage attributable to the federal government.

Source	% of All Income*
Local	29.3
State	43.7
Federal	26.8

*1978-79 figures, not 100% due to rounding.

The State level of funding (43.7%) is higher than the average for both State and local governments during 1977 across the nationwide PTV system. The average then was about 40% (McGill, 1979, p. 113). The federal participation in Virginia PTV is below the federal participation nationwide for 1977.

In spite of the higher than average State support of public television the percentage of total income represented by the ITV contract has been decreasing regularly. This is so even though

there have been increases in the total ITV contract amounts. The relationship of the ITV funds to the total PTV income for Virginia is shown in Table 1, page 8.

It is clear from the figures that the State level of funding for ITV services has not kept up with inflation. The State portion of PTV income attributable to the ITV contract is apparently on a decline. There is evidence to suggest that the ITV portion may decline even more rapidly.

It should be remembered, however, that the State funds from Virginia are intended for contracted services. They are not discretionary funds for use in any manner determined by the stations. The federal funds are generally available for purposes determined by the management of the stations. The level of federal funding depends in part upon the amount of non-federal funds received.

Virginia has invested money, other than ITV funds, in PTV. The State originally provided about $6 million in capital funding to get stations started or distributed facilities grants to stations already in operation. Since the State initially became involved it has distributed additional funds in the form of facilities grants to enable stations to expand their services. The Norton transmitter for the Blue Ridge ETV Association and the WCVE southern translator system are examples of facilities made possible due to State funds.

Historically, the State has not provided discretionary funds. The State funds are almost exclusively provided through the ITV contract for instructional services. The 1979 Legislature,

TABLE 1

Five-Year Comparison of ITV Contract and Total PTV Income

	1974-75	1975-76	1976-77	1977-78	1978-79
ITV contract amount	2,458,200	2,521,700	2,532,710	2,707,465	2,795,600
% increase over previous year	--	2.6%	.5%	6.9%	3.3%
% increase over 1974-75	--	2.6%	3.0%	10.0%	13.7%
Total income-all stations	4,304,984	5,052,341	5,547,013	5,844,214	*
% increase over previous year	--	17.4%	9.8%	5.4%	
% increase over 1974-75	--	17.4%	28.9%	35.0%	
% ITV is of income	57%	49.9%	45.7%	46.3%	

*Not available due to variations in fiscal year dates.

however, has appropriated $250,000 ($50,000 per PTV region) for program service grants. This is a clear indication that the Legislature recognizes the responsibilities of the Commonwealth and the importance of PTV in providing cultural, artistic, public affairs, and general interest programs to the citizens of Virginia.

These funds, and ITV contract funds, have been distributed by the Virginia Public Telecommunications Council (VPTC). The VPTC follows the Master State Plan for Public Telecommunications in administering the funds. There is a more detailed discussion of the ITV contract in a separate Working Paper. It is worth noting here, however, that the ITV contract funds are not looked upon as "funding" for stations. Rather, the ITV money is for specific services delivered by the stations. Such is not the case for the facilities and community service grants.

With the possible exception of the ITV contract, it is clear that the State has not been extravagant in its support of PTV.

MANAGEMENT

PTV stations are independent from the State. They are controlled by public corporations each with a board of directors made up of citizens from the area served. The day-to-day operations of the stations are the responsibility of the station manager and his staff. Recently, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting has required that a council of citizens representative of the population of the area served be selected to serve in an advisory capacity to

the station.

Maintenance of their independent status has been a concern of PTV across the country. Efforts have been made on the national level to insulate PTV from governmental influence. In Virginia, the State has a great deal of influence through the ITV contract which comprises such a large portion of a station's income. Beyond that, however, stations remain independent from State control. This independence from state/control is an important aspect of PTV in Virginia.

State involvement in promoting and supporting public television is primarily restricted to monitoring the delivery of contracted services and in negotiating the actual contract between the State and the station. Some minor promotions of the use of PTV facilities within State government has also been performed by VPTC. Until the passage of the program service grant legislation in 1979, there was little overt involvement with the stations regarding general public broadcasting.

One aspect of the ITV contract process, however, presented VPTC with a mechanism to support the stations: the "growth," "depreciation," and "overhead" portions of the ITV contract. Since the beginning of contracting for ITV programming, growth, depreciation and overhead has formed a part of the contract amounts negotiated by VPTC.

These factors represent a way to recognize overall station operation and growth in the dissemination of ITV programming. These amounts (up to 40% or more of the total ITV contract amount)

confuse the issue and make the ITV contract a mechanism for both purchase of a specific product (instructional programming) and subsidy of general public broadcasting, since the growth, depreciation and overhead amounts help sustain the stations for not only the ITV schedule, but for the evening schedule as well.

Growth, depreciation and overhead is, of course, a logical component of any broadcast or production service a public television station offers. The confusion that has resulted has been in its implicit subsidy characteristics making the total ITV dollar spent not exclusively directed to ITV educational programming. The resistance to this part of the ITV contracts by the Department of Education is justifiable, given its assumptions that the contract is for instructional television purposes.

The State's policy position since the inception of its interest in television in the 1960's has been to support public television as a public good. Its actions since that time have implicitly supported this policy view. Both the capital facilities grants and ITV contracting have been based on a State policy of support for "educational" television with a focus on instructional educational support. The passage of the 1979 PTV program service grants program has made explicit this long-held implicit policy stance.

The State, through the VPTC, could be more effective in promoting and supporting PTV for the citizens of Virginia. This can occur without direct involvement by the government in station management activities.

The State government has a role in public television. The PTV stations provide a needed service, providing cultural, educational, instructional and entertainment experiences that would otherwise not be available to most citizens of Virginia. Unfortunately, the PTV stations of Virginia are mid-to-small-sized and with the large ITV contract have minimal discretionary funds. As a result, the stations rely heavily on existing programming rather than local production.

The VPTC might help to promote PTV by educating agencies and cultural groups such as the Commission of the Arts and Humanities regarding the capability of PTV. For example, it was found that the presentation of a play over public stations in New York prompted an increase in attendance at other performances of the same play around the State. A State organization that funds modern dance in Virginia might do well to sponsor a public television presentation of modern dance. If the New York experience is any indication, a television presentation will lead to increased live attendance. In addition, it will bring dance to many people who might never buy a ticket to a performance.

The importance of explicit support of public television through direct funding and promotion is compounded in light of the technological progress that has been and is being made in telemedia delivery systems. If the Commonwealth faces its responsibility to provide instructional television to the schools of Virginia a dollar decrease in the ITV contract is possible.

Katzman described the implications of technology:

> ". . . technological change may have a great impact on ITV programming. Cable television, various video playback devices, and Instructional Television Fixed Service (ITFS) transmission may come to provide classroom teachers with multiple, flexible sources of television instruction. Much of the present justification for ITV that is broadcast by "open circuit" transmission is based on the fact that it is an inexpensive and relatively efficient means of providing programs. If and when other technologies such as cable television and inexpensive video playback devices, challenge the relative efficiency of open circuit broadcasting for classroom use, the emphasis in public television instructional services may shift toward a greater quantity of material that can be used in the home. The advent of other technologies may be far in the distant future. When they come they will undoubtedly cause changes in the target groups served by open circuit transmission and the subject matter it provides."
>
> (Katzman, 1976, pp. 63-64)

The technologies have implications beyond television in instruction. The full implications are not known. The State through some agency with PTV concerns should be studying the technologies and guiding the stations toward continually improving service in the future. It is not clear that the State is serving in that capacity even now.

SUMMARY

The Commonwealth of Virginia supports public television. The method of support, primarily ITV service contracting, while providing a large percentage of a station's income is not conducive to continued growth of and service by the stations. In fact, the current method of support has the potential to limit progress in both public television and education.

The review of PTV in Virginia has led to a number of conclusions:

1. The current method of State PTV funding is not conducive to growth of PTV in Virginia.

2. The current method of funding is confusing as to its intent--purchase services or fund PTV. The current contracting methods which includes identification of overhead, depreciation and growth elements of a contract are, at best, confusing and probably misleading.

3. The State agency responsible for telecommunications in the State is doing little to promote PTV use by agencies of Virginia.

4. The State has only recently made funds available for discretionary use by PTV stations. Such funds make it possible for a station to provide services costing much more than the value of the original grant by attracting viewers who support the station with donations.

5. There has been little, if any, study of the future of PTV by the appropriate Commonwealth agencies.

REFERENCES

Katzman, N., Program Decisions in Public Television. Washington, DC: National Association of Educational Broadcasters, (1976).

McGill, W.J., Chairman. A Public Trust, the Report of the Carnegie Commission on the Future of Public Broadcasting. New York: Bantam Books, (1979).